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ABSTRACT

Focus groups are conducted each year to gather information to help Research for Better Schools (RBS) in its planning process. This document reports on the latest round of focus groups held in spring and fall 1992. Eight focus-group sessions composed of parents, teachers, and students were conducted at one elementary and one high school in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, in their second year of restructuring. The following themes were identified: the development of connections between students and the school, new collaborative roles for teachers, new active student roles, and the importance of communicating and sharing the vision. The following problems of implementing school restructuring were identified: (1) teachers need significant staff development and support; (2) students who are less entrenched in traditional learning environments present less resistance to restructuring; (3) students often rebel against the vehicle designed to link them to both school and learning; and (4) efforts should be made to inform and include all members of the school community. (LMI)

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School Restructuring:

Building Connections, Adjusting to New Roles and Spreading the Vision

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INTRODUCTION

Focus groups are conducted each year to gather information to assist Research for Better Schools (RBS) in its planning process. Focus groups enable RBS to learn about issues that school district personnel are grappling with as they seek to restructure their schools. As a result, RBS staff are able to amass lessons learned and share that information with schools attempting to conduct similar restructuring efforts. As a result of this process, schools may be able to expedite the process (as they are saved from reinventing the wheel) as well as avoid some of the pitfalls associated with change.

This document reports on the latest round of focus groups held in the spring and fall of 1992. The report is organized into three major sections. The first describes the methodology used to select focus group participants, conduct the focus groups, and analyze the discussions. The second section analyzes the results of the focus group discussions and presents the reactions to change that emerged from them. The final section draws conclusions about the restructuring process as described by the focus group participants and the implication of these for RBS as it plans its future work.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct the FY 92 focus groups, RBS solicited the staff for nominations of schools within the Mid-Atlantic region with which they had direct contact and which they believed to be grappling with restructuring issues. Response was limited and several schools nominated proved unfeasible (e.g., due to union restrictions on staff time).

Selection of Participants

As a result, RBS had to rely on its connections with the NEA Learning Lab in Greensburg, Pennsylvania for all its focus groups. Greensburg is currently in its second year of program implementation. Restructuring is occurring in two schools within the district, one elementary and one high school. At the elementary school, classrooms were reconfigured to include multi-grade groupings of students in grades one through three in phase one and expanded to include a grouping of fourth and fifth graders for phase two of program implementation.

In the first year of restructuring at the high school, ninth grade students were housed in a school-within-a-school configuration with a team of teachers sharing a common group of students and a wing of the school. The rationale for this was an attempt to connect students to the school since it had been determined that such a connection was missing. During phase two, the program expanded to include all ninth and 10th graders and homerooms were dispersed throughout the school.

The teachers involved with phase one of program implementation had volunteered to participate and had spent a year and a half in planning prior to implementation. When the program expanded to incorporate additional grades, teachers were assigned, without the benefit of such extensive prior planning

time. Once the expansion was underway, however, all teachers shared a common planning time.

The focus groups were able to draw upon the experiences of a broad array of constituents at this site. Since efforts to restructure were occurring at both an elementary and a high school within the district, focus groups were conducted with groups of elementary school teachers and parents, as well as groups of high school teachers, parents and students. Composition of focus groups may be summarized as follows:

Group	Grade Level	Participants
1	Elementary school	Parents completing their first year of program participation
2	Elementary school	Parents completing their first year of program participation
3	Elementary school	Teachers -- combined phase one and phase two program participants
4	High school	Teachers -- phase one program participants
5	High school	Teachers -- phase two program participants
6	High school	Parents completing their first year of program participation
7	High school	Students completing their first year of program participation
8	High school	Students completing their first year of program participation

Since the schools were both in their second year of restructuring (following expansion from the original grades), focus groups included teachers who had a year of experience with the program, as well as teachers who were in the beginning of their first year of participation. Their responses to the two major stimuli (what appears to be working? what is difficult to implement and what are the barriers to implementation?) often reflected the difference in length of time that individual teachers had been involved with the program.

Conduct of Focus Group Sessions

Focus groups were conducted in classrooms at the two schools participating in the restructuring effort. All sessions began with introductions and explanations concerning the purpose of the groups. Each participant was provided with a name plate for the benefit of the group. Each session was taped, with all participants promised confidentiality of individual response.

The sessions typically lasted for 90 minutes with the moderator (RBS evaluation unit personnel) providing the stimulation for discussion but otherwise remaining outside the discussion of issues themselves.

Analysis of Focus Group Discussions

To facilitate the analysis, transcripts were made of all eight focus group sessions. The transcripts ranged in length from 14 pages (high school parents) to 23 pages (elementary school parents, elementary school teachers, and second year high school teachers). Each transcript was read several times to identify major themes and reactions and to highlight appropriate quotes for inclusion in the report. Quotes were edited to make the text more readable.

RESULTS

This section of the report summarizes the discussions of the eight focus groups. The major themes to emerge -- the building of bridges that connect students to both the school and learning, the anxiety associated with the new roles demanded of both teachers and students, and the importance of spreading the vision throughout all members of the school community -- are presented below.

Connections to Students

A student survey administered by the faculty at Greensburg High School determined that students felt disconnected from the school. This was true for students regardless of their level of academic achievement. This finding led to the decision to restructure the high school. The grouping of ninth graders with a team of teachers was an attempt to provide students with a sense of belonging as it fostered closer, personal relationships between students and teachers. Working together in small groups with a team of teachers who were able to share observations and concerns about these students was seen as a way to engage students in their own learning in an environment that was caring and supportive. The inclusion of a daily mentoring class was seen as an additional vehicle for building trust between students, and between students and teachers.

At the elementary school, while the approach was different, the vision was the same. Instead of same age groupings, students were grouped in multi-age groupings (initially first, second and third grade) with a team of teachers who would remain constant over a period of years. A feeling of connection to school would thus emerge as students stayed with the same students and teachers for multiple years.

Towards the end of the first year of implementation, some early signs of success were evident. Teachers and parents of both elementary and high school students were able to recognize both social and academic growth in their students as a result of the connections that were built. High school students themselves were less positive about the experience but their feelings of discontent were often a function of unmet expectations regarding the high school experience. Each of these areas is discussed below, with quotes from parents, teachers and students included to enrich the discussion.

Increased Academic Involvement

Teachers and parents of elementary school students reported that students were more highly motivated and engaged in the first year of the multi-age groupings. The combination of multi-age groupings working on thematic units together provided students with additional resources and generated excitement as students were able to contribute in ways that were previously impossible. For example, first graders were able to contribute ideas to a project and see them included in a report which was written by third graders.

> I think they are trying to instill in the children such a team working environment. It's like when the kids went through and made that big...it was a geometry project and the first graders started it, and the second graders added to it, and the third graders finished it off. The kids were so excited by seeing the progress, by age group, once they did their job and passed it on to the next group...when they saw the finished product and they had a hand in that and it turned out so great, it was so exciting.
>
> But what I liked is they wrote a little paper, an information sheet, or whatever, on the tarantula and they put a first grader, a second grader, and a third grader together to do it and...MR...hadn't really learned how to spell, how to write complete sentences, she was in first grade...but whenever you teamed them up with a second grader or third grader, they had this nice thing written. She said, "Mom, these were the two things I said. She pointed to them. She could find them. But they wrote them down for her. She wouldn't have been able to do something like that. She was so proud.

Working with younger students was often an important activity for low achieving third grade students who heretofore had only ever experienced inadequacy and failure when compared to their higher achieving peers. As one teacher reported,

> And the thing I found last year was one student in particular who was a third grader in my homeroom, who lacked a lot of self confidence, it showed in his interaction with his peers, in his academic work, and because now he had someone he could help, it showed him the way. He became more confident and as a result of that, his academics started to come up too. I think that was just terrific.

Placed in the position of knowing more and being able to help others, these third graders were able finally to experience themselves as successful learners. The result was greater confidence and self-esteem, which in turn led to increased levels of motivation. Meanwhile, teachers saw the younger students stretched as former barriers to learning and higher order skills were removed.

> Another strength that happened was, in first grade, what tends to happen, because they had experience with the second and third graders, I saw them being stretched.

They were almost like a guiding light to those first graders.

Similarly, parents were excited about the way in which their children were connected to their new learning experience.

> If they could instill that kind of enthusiasm in all the other teachers, I would be very happy, but it will break my heart if this thing were to end up and my kids get stuck with a teacher that is going to grump and order them around and take them out of this creative functional fluid environment and stick them back in a pigeon hole and ruin the rest of their education. That's my concern now. If this thing ends, and they yank them out of here and they put them back in a classroom with 25 kids or 27 kids and they're all sitting there staring at a teacher that's going to hit them on the knuckles with a ruler and say, "okay, memorize the multiplication tables," the way we had to learn, it would break my heart because the kids have become so creative and buoyant and interested in learning, and they do extra-curricula things with the encyclopedias. They read their library books that come home from school and they want to buy new books and read them, not just buy them to let them lay on the bookshelf.

Elementary school parents also reported that their children's attitudes towards school had changed. They looked forward to school and their enthusiasm for school was evident at home.

> I had a very hard time getting her to go to school the last two years because she didn't feel involved with the school and this year that's not a problem.

> S will come home and want to pick up an encyclopedia and learn something new that he already started talking about in school, which has never, never happened in his lifetime before that.

> I never have a complaint like, oh God, do I have to go to school today. It is hop up, take a shower, get ready for school, can we leave yet? Let's walk to school today. My kids love going to school.

> I like the way they do it because it's not like you're just sitting and reading from a book and just words. The kids really get involved in the project...D's been so enthused about all the different subjects that she's had this year...Rather than just picking up a book and saying, well, this is what a starfish looks like and telling a little bit about it. I mean they actually made them and experienced what this starfish was supposed to look and feel like and everything and it just seems like a better...I think they'll remember that kind of stuff longer than they would remember just reading words in a book.

> Last year, I know she was in no way enthusiastic as she was this year. And it didn't seem to be...she seems to really have fun with it this year. Where last year a lot of things seemed to be a real project, a real chore.

Teachers at the high school also reported a higher level of student involvement and participation.

> I think kids seemed to have participated at a level that they had not in the past...I can think of instances now where there are kids in school this year that would have dropped out...due to the relationship that I had built with them, things that we talked about on goal setting and things like that...a couple of kids have come up to me and commented about things that happened in mentor class last year...they have not had that experience before at school...and thanked me so deeply for, it seemed to me, sincerely as a fifteen year old can or whatever.

> We guided kids into various little extra curricula activities/projects that otherwise they would never have been involved in...I was getting kids that I knew would never participate in anything at school...those are the ones I focused on and got involved with. We all did that...Whether that sustains and holds up their entire high school years I don't know but for that one instant, for that snapshot in time, those experienced some success in a way they wouldn't have in the past and that may be pushy and manipulative on our part but that's what we are.

High school parents added,

> It worked out fine. He likes a lot of the style of learning that they are doing. He likes a lot of the independent study that they are doing. His grades reflect it. He's been on the distinguished honor roll each time. Maybe as a boy he doesn't give me a lot of feedback, but I see it in his test results and his class work. That he puts a lot of time into activities and assignments that they receive. That is a reflection to me that he likes it.

> I think C has improved a lot. I'd say 70 percent.

> (She's) maybe not quite (as satisfied being average)...she does study more this year...because of the different things they have to do.

Teachers attributed much of the increase in student involvement and participation to the additional attention focused on students by multiple teachers working together as a team.

> We chose to make part of our final performance-based and so J (who teaches social studies) and I did a Student Congress in which they researched issues which had roots in history and

had been studied and they literally had to give persuasive speeches, pro and con...One girl in particular stands out in my mind. She failed at least one nine week [marking period] because she could not, would not, give a speech. She stood up, gave a speech and she passed for the year. I don't think that would have happened had she not been in a situation where people were pushed to do that, where she had the attention of five people...She would still be in a ninth grade classroom this year.

Another academic impact that I saw was the fact that, because so much writing was going on in all the classrooms, a tremendous increase in fluency...They were writing in Science class, they were writing in Social Studies class and, of course, writing in English. In Visual Communications, J did wonderful things in journal entries the last nine weeks and that's, again, when you have four or five teachers having you do it, you get better in spite of yourself. And so there was tremendous growth in that respect.

Students thus became involved in the academic life of their school due in large part to the teaming of teachers who shared a common set of students and met as a group to share concerns. Teaming also contributed to a greater sense of connection between the teachers who were used to "flying solo" and now were able to draw on the expertise and experience of their fellow team members instead. These and other benefits of teacher teaming are discussed further in the section on new roles for teachers.

Greater Social Connections

The positive gains of new groupings of students were not confined to increased academic involvement and motivation. Based on the accounts given by their teachers and parents, elementary school students have also benefitted socially from the multi-age groupings through the creation of "a sense of family." This was particularly true for students at either end of the age grouping. The interaction of students of different ages was credited with producing greater maturity in younger students, as well as greater patience and tolerance in older students.

My big concern going into the lab program was the fact that they (sister and brother) were going to be together. That we were going to continue this competition in school and it was going to ruin the child's life. Well, it's done just the opposite. If anything, it's made M more tolerant and she allows S to come up with the answer first...She helps him work through... pretends like she's the teacher to the point where she'll go down and get the easel and she'll duplicate what the teachers do to help think through a problem. And now he'll take his homework to M...I guess my fears were unnecessary because it's turned to where it's made them both more tolerant.

I think the mixing this year, even though she's a second grader...as you say, the third graders, sometimes they serve

> as a role model for some things. And I think that they try to imitate and even maybe try to think like some of them. I think it has helped her to overcome some of the immaturity. Plus the fact that she feels like a big cheese around the first graders.

Elementary school students also became comfortable with more than one teacher as a result of the teams of teachers to which they were exposed.

> It was fun to watch the kids at the beginning of the year when they'd be out in the playground and something would happen to them and they'd run to their homeroom teacher. And then, as time went on, they were interchangeable. They could go to one, two, three of them, whichever was closest to that group. They just didn't make a big distinction.

At the high school, students developed close ties within their groups largely as a result of the daily mentoring sessions. During these sessions, students learned a lot about their fellow students as they engaged in goal setting and other life skill building activities. Teachers made the following observations.

> To me, the big difference is our kids in mentoring. My kids have been really open to that and I think it was really eye opening for them when I actually sat down and wrote a short term goal for myself as an example...It's easy for us to find out things about them, but it's harder for them to find out things about us and I don't think it diminishes the respect that students have for you when they find out that you have feelings and a life of your own.

> I think the mentoring provides the forum for students to really learn and share with each other which for me is just as important as sharing it with the teacher.

> I think that's (mentoring) part of the reason that we have kids hanging around our rooms. I believe that a bond was made...We've played a role in their lives that no teacher has probably ever played before...

As illustrated by the above quotes, a closer connection between students and teachers also grew out of these mentoring sessions as teachers listened to and shared personal feelings and experiences on a variety of issues. Evidence of this connection was visible as the students returned to school in the fall following their first year of program participation. Students sought out their teachers from the previous year and complained about the void they felt as they struggled to establish similar bonds with their new group of teachers and students.

> A little girl who complained a great deal last year came to her (teacher) and said she couldn't believe how she missed being in that mentor group.

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The building of a sense of connection at the high school was somewhat complex, however. While students clearly developed closer ties to their peers and teachers, the process was not an easy one. Students fought against the structure that ran counter to their expectations regarding the social life of high school. When students entered ninth grade with erroneous assumptions about taking classes with upperclassmen, the program encountered serious resistance from many students who complained about being isolated and confined. Students thus balked at the very structure which was to be the vehicle for building the bonds designed to connect them to the school. In addition to taking classes with upperclassmen, they wanted to be able to move around the school between classes -- considered another opportunity to socialize with upperclassmen -- instead of being confined to one hallway for most of their classes. Resistance was so strong in some cases that students withdrew from the program altogether.

> I think lab school is fun, but they should do it on middle school people, not high school. High school is a time for your regular high school days.
>
> We're all in that little hall, it's like we're little kids. I don't know a lot of people that my friends do because I'm just in the...all I know is the lab school kids.
>
> (I was expecting) to be able to have classes with all different people and stuff. To be able to walk in the halls actually. We're all in with 9th graders. We were expecting to be in with a mixture of 10th and 11th graders.

Students thus entered high school with preconceived notions about the social roles in high school. They expected to be able to smooth the transition from "big man" on middle school "campus" to freshman in high school by having easy and ready access to upperclassmen, both in classes and in the hallways between classes. Instead, they saw themselves viewed as "babies" by upperclassmen, tucked away in their own hallway. As a result of student discontent regarding this feeling of isolation, changes were made which have the potential to undermine the very sense of connection that the program sought to foster. (This is discussed in greater detail under a later section of the report related to spreading the vision.)

Elementary school children, however, adjusted well to the social roles expected of them in multi-age groupings. In fact, while recognizing the benefits of multi-age groupings, it was the elementary parents who voiced concerns and appeared uncomfortable with the new social roles in which their children were placed.

> The only thing that I'm concerned about as far as this lab school and this pod business and everything is that they don't seem to interact with the other children that are their same age. Not even at lunch time, not on the playground...I can understand the comfortableness of being in a small, close-knit little group but why shouldn't they get to be with the other second graders or the other first graders. I don't like that because some day, sixth grade rolls around and they get thrown into this great big school with all these other

> kids, and they don't know the 100 that they would know. They know this 25.
>
> I would like to see the first grade play with the other first graders, second grade play with all the other second graders...only because my daughter and son both have been wounded by older children on the playground.
>
> Here if you start out with a great class your first year, you're fine, but if not, then I think you feel kind of stuck.

As mentioned above, teacher teaming placed teachers in a new role with additional resources, i.e., the ability to share ideas and flexibility of class periods. Not all the consequences of restructuring were as welcome, however, as teachers were not always comfortable with the new roles in which they found themselves. The "highs and lows" of these new roles is the subject of the following section.

New Roles for Teachers

To promote the connection of students to schools, teachers were required to make significant changes in the way they conducted their classrooms. In addition to changes in classroom configuration wrought by same or multi-age groupings, discussed above, teachers also had to learn to interact with their students and fellow teachers in alternative instructional ways. This was not always easy to accomplish when both teachers and students shared experiences and preconceptions about learning and teaching. These new roles required teachers who were used to working on their own to work as a team; they required teachers who were used to relatively impersonal relationships with their students to get "up close and personal" with them; they required teachers who were used to having control of the activities in their classroom to relinquish some of that control as they moved from director to facilitator of their students' learning. Finally, these new roles required teachers schooled in single subject presentations to reorganize their lessons into thematic or interdisciplinary units. Each of these mid-course ("mid-life") changes, and the raising or lowering of stress associated with them, is described below.

Teacher Teaming

The ability of teachers to share students and joint planning time was seen as a major factor in the survival of teachers as they embarked on their journey into restructuring. In addition to developing a greater sense of the problems confronting their students, they were able to draw upon the ideas and strengths of their fellow team members. When a teacher was uncomfortable with a particular topic on the mentoring agenda, for example, another teacher traded places and took over the session.

> We had the ability last year, because of having the mentoring sessions, we started to trade off. We found that if a teacher had a strength in an area and a different mentor felt that they would like their group to have that experience but they did not feel comfortable in leading that sort of experience, we could trade.

Teachers at the high school were fully cognizant of the extent to which they needed, and benefitted from, the teaming approach to teaching.

> I don't think we would have been able to make it this far without each other.

> It's only so far that you can bend your creative mind and if you can get into somebody else's creative head and get some ideas, I think it's wonderful. I really like interacting with the teachers, seeing what they're doing.

> We all teach the same kids, pretty much. This way there's more continuity. We can track these kids so if there is a problem with a kid, we can intercede faster and deal with the problem.

The close physical proximity of the classrooms facilitated communication between the teachers: they only had to open their doors and walk into the hallway as classes changed in order to connect with other team members.

> I think a lot of them (new teachers) would crave that feeling of closeness we had. I think we've lost a lot by being separate. We had the ability to talk across the halls, he and I would change things instantaneously. If we wanted to do something together we would do it. I'm on the third floor, he's on the first floor. I can't talk to him.

Teachers also found that sharing students and joint planning led to greater reinforcement of learning strategies as students were presented with the same set of expectations from all their teachers.

> I think the team concept of teachers helps the student realize how much more we're interested in an individual...I don't give as many directions or as often than I had in the past. I think the kids realize that's the same thing Mr. S told us, it's the same thing Mr. M told us. They expect us to do this is math, they expect us to do this in our history [class].

The result was a change in attitudes towards learning as students began to see connections between subjects. Parents also were able to see continuity and interrelationship of subjects.

> It seems like they're beginning to see a carry over in the material and the content of the courses.

> I have seen signs that things are being done in the lab school program that I think are going to be extremely helpful to these kids. I think they are learning writing as part of a process which I'm strongly in favor of. I think they are being encouraged to read.

> I like the way also that they have shown the kids how their subjects relate to one another. Again, that's something we

never had. You did English, you did math, you did science. I like the way they show them they can do an English paper that relates to their history lesson or whatever.

Similarly, teachers at the high school discussed signs of progress and success that resulted from teacher teaming.

> The reinforcement, I think, is immeasurable. When a student writes a paper for an English class and a social studies class at the same time, content comes from social studies, the writing technique comes from English and there's something more real about that then.

> Another academic impact that I saw was the fact that because so much writing was going on in all of our classrooms too, tremendous increase in fluency...when you have four or five teachers having you do it, you get better in spite of yourself. And so there was tremendous growth in that respect.

Personalized Relationships

On a less positive note, mentoring presented a few teachers with challenges they felt unprepared to meet. Feeling that a guidance counselor was the more obvious choice to address many of the mentoring issues, some teachers struggled with the appropriateness of knowing intimate details of their students' lives and worried that such knowledge threatened the objectivity with which they traditionally treated their students and which they had been trained to employ with regard to student assessment. Several teachers did not feel comfortable "bearing their souls" and discovered a need to maintain the traditional distance between themselves and students, thus threatening the ability of the program to build connections between the school and the students.

> I feel I have to be a trained psychologist to do it, and I'm not...I get frightened when I have to do that [talk] all year long...The mentoring scares me.

> Well, it's new territory...We've never been trained.

> We're kind of out of our realm of our subject matter...and I just feel inadequate in a lot of areas.

> I think sometimes when you know things about a person, that may tend to bias you for or against that person. That has been a real concern of mine.

Given that building connections between schools and students hinged on breaking down the personal barriers between teachers and students, teachers could clearly have benefitted from additional preparation in this area to eliminate the tension they felt when confronted with personal issues.

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Director vs. Facilitator

Teachers also struggled with the new role of facilitator as they moved away from teacher directed/passive learning and attempted to encourage students to take on greater responsibility for their own learning, i.e., to become more active learners. The new teaching strategy required teachers to relinquish some control of their classes as students were placed into cooperative learning groups and expected to help each other think through the issues and problems.

High school teachers voiced concerns about the instruction time lost through cooperative learning strategies, and the implications of this for covering the curriculum.

> I haven't mastered guiding them...they are off the path too much and I feel that I can still get more work out of them in a more teacher-directed environment.
>
> I think because I have the students doing a lot of work with each other, they're interacting a great deal with each other. I never have enough time.

This tension between employing new teaching strategies and covering the curriculum is felt particularly at the elementary school level which tends to be more driven by a "curriculum package" than is true at the high school level. Thus elementary teachers felt more pressure to cover the material and also more tied to subject units, presenting problems for them as they attempted to construct thematic or interdisciplinary units, the subject of the next section of the report.

Thematic/Interdisciplinary Units

The area which produced the most anxiety in teachers, particularly at the elementary school level, was the move towards teaching thematic or interdisciplinary units. Nowhere was the need for staff development more clear as teachers panicked about the construction of new curricula units for which they had no model, no training, no college course experience.

> But I really believe the pressure's on us to come up with a thematic unit that I have not been trained to do.
>
> I need a model.
>
> I need to see it.
>
> And I want to see it work.

The teaching of thematic units caused concern for many of these teachers who worried about their inability to cover the same amount of material.

> I think it's frightening because all of a sudden you're in charge of choosing what to put in there, what knowledge do these kids need to have. You're taking an awful lot on your shoulders. But before you had that book in front of you, you knew what you had to cover. And now that's gone.

Teachers clearly lacked confidence in their ability to produce something new, something untried, and something which required extensive planning time that was not built into the school calendar. Their frustrations were evident in the following quotations.

> I don't have time in the day to get organized...I feel like I'm being overwhelmed with things that I'm not prepared to do. I'm all for thematic units but for crying out loud...
>
> There just isn't time. It gets to be Friday and I don't have lesson plans.
>
> I just don't have the five hours a night that some of them spend to produce the wonderful things they are (producing).
>
> I can't get in much earlier than 6:40...I lie awake at 3:00 in the morning thinking.
>
> It becomes like a nightmare. I've always tried to have things ready. I'm barely making it. The temperature's rising.

One phase one teacher attributed much of the anxiety felt by phase two teachers to the fact that the new teachers had not benefitted from the same amount of upfront planning time. This planning time given to the initial group of teachers allowed them to work through many of these issues.

> We had a lot more training...We got to see it work and we got to talk to people that were working, that were enthused. And then we really bought into it.

The new roles for teachers required by restructuring were sometimes difficult for them to assume. The results were mixed. Sometimes they overcame their frustration and lack of comfort due to the support of other teachers in their teams. At other times, they were clearly crying out for help, or resisting the changes that made them uncomfortable. They were not alone. Students, particularly those at the high school, were also presented with new roles and responded in a variety of ways to the challenges presented to them. This is the subject of the next section.

New Roles for Students

The message that rang out loud and clear from the focus groups was that adapting to change (restructuring) is much easier for those less entrenched in traditional teaching/learning experiences, i.e., those who have the least adjustments to make. Elementary school children, and the younger students within that group, adapted well to the changes in age groupings and teaching methods because they had fewer expectations about what school should be like. High school students, however, and older children at the elementary school level, were forced to enter into new roles which often were at odds with their expectations and/or their previous experience. The major adjustment involved taking an active role in their own learning which required them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Active Learners

The vision of restructuring at the high school included concrete assumptions about the changes in student learning that would occur as a result of the process. "Student as worker" -- an active participant in the process instead of a passive recipient of teacher-directed instruction -- was the goal that emerged from the planning phase and one which guided instruction as the program was implemented. Students, however, were used to teachers handing them "facts on a plate" with very few decisions to be made about either the form or content of their learning. When suddenly faced with teachers-as-facilitators who threw their questions back on them, forcing students to problem-solve and make decisions about their use of time and the way in which information was to be processed, students were confused and lacked the necessary script to guide them.

> We work a lot harder. We teach ourselves most of the time.
>
> It's always just giving you a packet of something. You just read it and then you just learn for yourself. There's hardly ever, you know, her telling us, teaching us.
>
> I need to ask. I need people to tell me exactly what to do.
>
> If you ask if you're doing something right, he'll go, do you think you're doing it right?

A parent had heard similar frustrations expressed.

> I've also heard that they are uncomfortable with that, that they are left to figure it out, and help one another. That's what one person said one night, "I think that's good that we are supposed to be learning for ourselves and figuring these things out." But she continued, "I don't think that we should, when we are all confused, I don't think that we should try to help each other." And I'm sure that's an over simplification. I think that maybe they don't have the confidence, that one of them has it, then they're really worried. Then they're all going wrong.

Mathematics appeared to be a particularly difficult subject for students to master under the new teacher-as-facilitator approach.

> I need structure in math. Anything else, I don't need structure to learn.
>
> The teachers should teach math because it might not come as easy to other students. Some students can get it right away, but other students, it might be harder.
>
> I know that in math classes, if somebody in your group doesn't understand it, the teacher won't explain it to you, somebody in your group explains it to you. If everybody in your group doesn't understand, then you're out of luck.

> For instance, homework, for a lesson, he'll just assign a lesson and we're supposed to go home, read it, do the problems, and come back and then review it. He should go over the lesson first, and then we go home and do the homework. You might just not understand it, reading it out of the book. You may need help.

While students were uncomfortable with the level of responsibility thrust upon them, teachers reported that students learned to cope and in the process, were better equipped to make decisions.

> One thing we did last year and we're just beginning to do this year is empower the kids with student's choice and that was an interesting thing. At the beginning of the year we threw a great deal of choice at them and learned that they weren't ready to handle that. By the end of the year, they had really matured in the decision making process and became very adept at making decisions about the types of activities that they wanted to do.

> At the end of the year they could do anything...You could throw anything you wanted at them, as complex a set of directions and logistics as you wanted and they would do it...my years prior, I would have had to explain and give a handout for everything that we did and basically walk people through...they were a little more responsible.

Cooperative Learners

The role of cooperative learner was also one in which these students were uncomfortable. As noted above, they had to learn to work with students not usually included in their circle of friends. Student reactions were mixed.

> I like working with my friends because I think I can get stuff done easier.

> I don't like it sometimes when they say you have to work in a group, because sometimes you don't want to work in a group, you just want to work alone. Sometimes they put a limit on how many people can be in a group, like only two people, when you have more than two friends.

> I hate when they put you with people you don't like. You don't work as well and it makes you angry and you just don't want to learn whatever you're learning.

> I hate how we get graded from the group's effort.

As the final quote indicates, students also had to come to terms with the idea that their grade was dependent not only on their own effort but also on the effort of others. This involved a level of trust which had to be established as the year progressed.

At the elementary school level, the younger students were still in the process of formulating their scripts and had less difficulty in adjusting to the new methods of learning. As one teacher noted,

> (By the middle of the year) they were making choices and decisions and accepting the new way.

Spreading the Vision

A major tenet of restructuring is that the vision that drives the effort has to be shared by all members of the school community (teachers, parents and students) in order for change to occur, i.e., ownership of the vision will lead to a commitment to change. Without such ownership, restructuring efforts risk being undermined by those in the school community resistant to change. The extent to which this vision was shared by teachers, parents, students, and program administrators is the subject of this next section.

Teachers

Greensburg presents an example of a restructuring effort where vision and ownership clearly had not spread from those teachers involved in the original design phase of the program. This, in fact, may be a function of the way in which the program expanded in phase two: teachers were "drafted" or pressed into "service" compared to those in phase one who volunteered to serve. Those teachers who shared the vision and created the program thus came to restructuring with a different mind set from those who joined the effort in progress. The latter felt they were presented with no alternative, and were not consulted or adequately informed regarding the demands of the process. The following quotes reflect the resentment harbored by at least two of these teachers.

> They didn't feel us out, how we felt about it...I felt they should have sat us down and talked to us and just tried to get a little input from us.

> I was drafted!

The frustration likely was intensified as a result of limited upfront planning time for these newly assigned teachers. The result was some degree of resentment and resistance, and a lack of understanding and commitment to the restructuring process. (Also resentful were teachers who applied for a position in the program initially but who were not chosen to participate.)

Many elementary teachers were also struggling with multiple changes as new math and reading curricula (Chicago Math and Open Court, respectively) were introduced at the same time as the Learning Lab, while at the high school, teachers also had to contend with new technology, facilities construction, and a new biology curriculum, in addition to the Learning Lab's mentoring curriculum. With these multiple changes occurring in the schools, teachers often felt overwhelmed and confused, and frequently blamed restructuring for anything that was producing anxiety.

Teachers need help in understanding that the process of restructuring is slow and bumpy and must be carefully nurtured if change is to occur. They also

need to be supported through training when confronted with new roles and demands that make them uncomfortable. This kind of support will make it easier for them to buy into the vision and take ownership of the vehicle which will make the vision a reality.

Parents

Teachers were not alone in their lack of understanding about what constituted the Learning Lab. Due to the multiple curricula changes that have occurred within the district over the past several years, parents often were confused about which changes occurred due to Learning Lab and which occurred as a result of the new curricular changes. Such confusion also may indicate that district personnel failed to spread the vision among these important constituents.

While communication between the school and home reportedly increased, it was not merely enough to inform. Teachers saw a need to retrain parents with a different set of expectations while parents learned that participation and involvement were also needed. When such involvement occurred, parents were less resistant to change (e.g., new reporting and assessment practices) and more willing and able to take ownership of the process themselves. As one teacher noted,

> I think parents became more comfortable with the program. We tried to do a lot of communicating with the pa.ents and parents were real positive about the communication they received...and I found it also helped us to get parents to understand what is interdisciplinary instruction...The teachers would write suggestions for what they could talk to their kids about at home.

Parents were grateful for the amount of communication they received and the way in which it contributed towards a greater understanding of the changes that were taking place.

> And the way the lab school has kept us informed of what's happening. We get periodic letters that fill us in on what's happening...And I think that's a great thing, to be able to catch up.
>
> I do learn many things from the letters that come from the school too. I appreciate that. I think that parental involvement in the educational process is important.
>
> I thought they bent over backwards trying to explain the program to us in the beginning because so many parents were against it and had oppositional views and they had open house for us.

In addition to improved communication between home and school, parents found themselves drawn into the actual education of their children.

> They have a program called VIP, Very Important Parents...where you can come in and volunteer time...I think

there's a total of 15 mothers, no fathers got involved, reading in the classroom, different things. I personally took on the xerox machine...I just always felt that why should a teacher have to...if I can xerox for 3 hours, think of the time that they have to do that.

...it seems like the parents that are involved in the program are more interested in their children. They work harder with their children, they make sure their homework gets done.

The home links. Go home and do this with your parents, go home and ask your parent this or go to the store with your parent and do the grocery shopping.

Not all parents were as thrilled about the additional demands placed upon them.

I think it encourages parent involvement because they send so much home, that God you feel so guilty if you don't go over it. And if you don't go over it with them, then they end up behind at school.

They send home an awful lot of homework for the parent to do and I really, a lot of times get very tired of it. I went to school and I went to college and I did my homework. I don't feel like I have to do any more.

As the program expands, efforts must be made to reeducate parents regarding the new demands that will be placed upon them, as well as their children. When parents do not share the vision, change can be a hard pill to swallow.

Students

Students must also buy into the vision and be helped to understand that the restructuring process is slow, and that promises made may require time to implement. Expectations must be considered and ways found to ease the transition for those already schooled in traditional teaching/learning practices. As the following quotes illustrate, students complained of "false advertising" and criticized the program for not delivering as promised.

We took a test last year to see our learning styles and they tried to help each one that had a different learning style but it's not been that way...It's pretty much taught just one way to everyone.

At first they did a little bit, when we first started with the learning styles, but I think after a while, they gave up on it.

We were supposed to do some kind of community work but our teacher, she keeps putting it off. She says we're going to. We wrote down a whole list of stuff we wanted to talk about this year. All we've talked about is what we want to do in

> college and goal setting. Nothing that we've wanted to talk about.
>
> They said everyone was going to have computers. My mom was really mad about that because she thinks that I should know how to type and everything and when she found out, she was really mad.

One student also complained about the way in which the program had changed during the first year.

> I think in the beginning lab school was different because we were grouped according to something, like (learning) structures. That really worked, I liked that.

Instead of understanding that change is a process and does not occur overnight, high school students thought they had been "duped" into accepting their assignment to the program by the promise of greater freedom and privileges which, in their minds, had not materialized. In addition, participation in the program often meant that high school students were restricted from taking courses or participating in extra-curricula activities. This caused additional resentment on the part of some students.

> I'm missing out on a lot of stuff in the school that I really looked forward to last year.
>
> There are certain classes, I think it was chorus or something that people signed up for, but they couldn't take it because of lab school.
>
> Like the yearbook. I was on the yearbook staff, but I couldn't take it. There was a lot of stuff for the yearbook I couldn't do.

Administrators

Administrators involved in restructuring must also realize that the road to change is slow and bumpy. They must guard against acting too quickly to appease "complainers" at the expense of those for whom the process is working. When high school students in phase one complained about feeling isolated, homerooms were dispersed throughout the school thereby interfering with the "life line" or ready access of fellow team teachers that had been a critical support to them during the previous year. Teachers made the following observations.

> The problem we experienced with those kids last year was that they moved from middle school and came to "senior high school" and they didn't feel like it was senior high and they felt like they were all lined up in these four rooms. So these guys in their infinite wisdom decided that was probably not the best program. It was nice for us because the kids were here, their lockers were here, everything was here. Now the home rooms are all over.

> They are feeling like they have more autonomy than last year. And that's the Catch-22 because in order to do the things that we wanted to do, we had to literally create a problem...and now we've solved that problem this year.
>
> Yes, we've solved it from the student's perspective, but from the teacher's perspective, we're all discussing the fact that might create other problems for us.

As noted above, however, this perceived "isolation" of students, combined with teams of teachers and a mentoring program, had served to connect students, whether they liked it or not.

Similarly, teacher complaints about the strain and drain of teaching for large blocks of time resulted in the elimination of this special scheduling, along with the greater flexibility it afforded teachers to continue with a lesson if a natural break did not happen to coincide with the bell.

> So the schedule should be somehow fixed so that we have more of a chance to lengthen classes (like last year).
>
> If, in fact, you are going to attempt to do more than just token interdisciplinary work, there has to be some kind of way within the schedule to accommodate that.
>
> Somewhere, somebody has got to say, okay, you five or six people, you have control of these 130 kids, you do whatever you want with them. That's basically what happened last year. We did anything we wanted with them but in time blocks.
>
> Some of my frustrations are I would like to see this move, I would accelerate this a lot faster...We're going back a little bit...I worry about what next year's going to look like...I invested a lot of time and energy in the last year...And I don't want to see the compromises made. Yea, it's difficult. Scheduling is a bitch, it's going to cause some trouble. Does that mean we don't do it? You can't keep compromising and making excuses, well these people aren't going to be able to handle it. Well, that's too bad, they will handle it.

Thus, program administrators must guard against reacting too quickly to criticisms and allow time for program participants to adjust to the changes.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The parents, students and teachers who participated in the eight FY 92 focus groups provided insights into the problems of implementing school restructuring. First, teachers involved in restructuring efforts need significant staff development and support as they struggle to break away from traditional teaching roles. Teacher teaming, personalized relationships with students, and teacher-

as-facilitator all required teachers to adjust to new demands, as did the construction of thematic and interdisciplinary units. The teachers who were provided with extensive planning time and training prior to program implementation were clearly better able to face these demands once the program was implemented. That is not to say that phase one teachers were without anxiety and self doubt; they did, however, manage to establish a sense of camaraderie and provide each other with the necessary support. Phase two teachers, while theoretically benefitting from some of the lessons learned by their first year colleagues, lacked adequate planning time up-front and struggled with curriculum redesign at the same time as they confronted new classroom configurations.

Second, restructuring efforts face less resistance from students who are themselves less entrenched in traditional learning environments and practices. Elementary school students displayed less resistance (and hostility) to the program than did high school students because they had fewer expectations about what their schooling experience should be like. This was particularly true when older students were confronted with teacher-as-facilitator and cooperative learning strategies.

Third, building bridges that connect students to both school and learning is a complex operation with students often rebelling against the vehicle designed to facilitate the process. Program adjustments must be considered carefully so that changes made in response to student complaints do not undermine either the process or the vision. When teachers have established patterns of support through interacting and working together, care must be taken to balance the necessary connection of teachers with the "isolation" of students.

Fourth, efforts must be made to inform and include all members of the school community in the restructuring effort. Without a shared vision, teachers are likely to face opposition on all fronts, not only from other teachers and students, but from parents who are themselves often resistant to new teaching practices. Communication with parents is vital as restructuring frequently poses problems for parents whose own school experiences, like those of their older children, leave them uncertain and confused about new teaching practices.

The focus groups highlighted the problems encountered when schools attempt to restructure. New roles were not easily assumed and discomfort was felt by all involved -- teachers, students and parents. This is true particularly for those who did not share the vision of change and the vehicle designed to implement it. Thus while focus group participants were able to describe certain positive changes that had occurred, their enthusiasm was always tempered by doubts and concerns. The insights gained from the focus groups, while neither surprising nor unexpected, will remind RBS of the challenges to be faced as it moves to assist schools in their efforts to restructure.